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NOTE

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FROM Italy (Phillips) DATED Nov. 3, 1937
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(Enclosing report of October 8, 1937 from Mr. Jay Walker, Cairo)

REGARDING: People -- Libya.
Information concerning the various tribes.

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Native Moslems.

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The Encyclopedia Britannica -- ninth edition, extended, 1902 -- gave the native population of Libya as 1,200,000, while the latest official Italian records indicate that there are at present only about 700,000 native Moslems in the country. Some of the old Italian residents there admit that the Moslem population has greatly decreased since the Italian occupation. This undoubtedly may be accounted for as a result of the military campaigns to conquer the country and the apparent Italian policy to rid their colony of the upper class Arab families. Those who did not fall in the campaigns between 1921 and 1929, migrated in thousands to Tunisia, Southern Algeria, and Egypt. It is evident that the Moslems in Libya are now without cultural leaders, and are decidedly less advanced in many ways than the Arabs in North Africa under French and British rule.

The nomadic tribes in the interior raise small herds of camels, goats, horses, and donkeys, and are continuously on the move in search of pasture. The drought of 1936, caused them to lose more than ninety per cent. of their herds. A great number of the Moslems living in the oases follow agricultural pursuits. A few of those living in the cities and towns are merchants, and a much larger class seek manual labor as a means of livelihood.

For several years, the Italian administration has been endeavoring to induce as many natives as possible to join the military forces. As sufficient numbers failed to volunteer for the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, conscription had to be enforced, calling to the colors

those

those between the ages of 18 and 35 years who were not the sole support of families. No attempt was made to enforce conscription on the tribes in the interior.

It was estimated in good sources that there were probably sixty thousand Libyan natives in the Italian forces at the end of 1936. This number included troops in East Africa and those stationed in Libya. During the writer's stay in the colony, there were several rather serious attempts at revolt among the natives. According to reports, the difficulties arose when the Italians started to ship native regiments to East Africa for war service. Two divisions of Libyans, however, were sent and saw active service on the Somali front. Up until April 1937, only some seven hundred wounded natives had returned from East Africa -- the remainder being accounted for as casualties, or held for further service in the East. Apparently there is little difficulty encountered in recruiting the natives for army service when the pay about equals that earned by laborers but, due to the drought and the resulting lack of food, it was recognized that they entered the Italian military forces out of necessity rather than loyalty to their conquerors.

It became evident in the latter part of 1936, that the Italians were preparing to change their previous policy towards the Arabs who had suffered heavily through loss of leaders, confiscation and destruction of property, and the stern rule of a domineering conqueror. The Italian offer to rebuild destroyed mosques and to furnish a certain number of schools came as a welcome relief to an oppressed people. Concrete evidence of the change of
policy

policy was evinced when great sums of money, as well as clothing and food were distributed freely to the Moslems immediately before and during Premier Mussolini's visit in March 1937. It may be remembered also that Marshal Balbo's proclamation to the Libyan Moslems, issued just before the Premier's arrival was to the effect that the "Duce is the protector of Islam. Shout aloud his name and invoke the light and glory on his path".

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